

NONTRADITIONAL CENTERS: PROMOTING NONTRADITIONAL STUDENT SUCCESS
IN HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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Abstract

Nontraditional students are a growing and changing population of students that encompass a wide variety of demographics and have many external factors that contribute to their academic and social success. Institutions are meant to be a tool for social transformation, and as more nontraditional students move towards higher education, they are proving that lifelong learning is an essential aspect of human development not only for personal goals, but also for social, cultural, and economic purposes (Baptista, 2013). Institutions need to promote success for all students by continuously adjusting themselves to an always emergent and ever changing reality. Colleges will need to find and use best practices to guide nontraditional students in their academic and social success. Although their needs, motivations, and level of engagement may vary from traditional students, the overall mission of an institution is to create successful, well rounded, holistically developed citizens. Institutions would greatly benefit from creating a space that helps develop these students through the use of a center. A nontraditional center would allow practitioners to combine many of the best practices that can aid students in their college experience. Nontraditional student enrollment trends are unlikely to change in the future and investing in a space that addresses the factors and barriers that can inhibit degree attainment will be necessary for success. This master's report will include the current enrollment trends of higher education, the differing characteristics of nontraditional and traditional students, history of nontraditional student enrollment, barriers and challenges to success, motivations to attend higher education, theoretical frameworks outlining success of nontraditional students and their adult identity development, how to promote nontraditional student success, and best practices that outline the characteristics of an ideal center.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this report to my wonderful support group. Beginning with my husband, who has provided me with so much support and has empowered me to pursue my dreams and passions in graduate school and the professional world. Without his constant love and patience, I would never have been able to successfully complete this report. To the rest of my family, thank you for listening to me on the phone and in person constantly talking about this report! Whether you are near or far, every one of you has been a supportive, essential piece in this report. I would also like to dedicate this report to all of the professionals and colleagues who have supported me along the way. Dr. Christy Craft, Dr. Kenneth Hughey, and Dr. Camilla Roberts have been a fantastic graduate committee. Dr. Craft has been there through every edit, question, and inquiry that I have ever had and has encouraged me to grow, learn, and succeed not only as a graduate student, but as a successful professional. To my colleagues and peers, thank you for lending me your ear and being willing to listen to all of my struggles, triumphs, and disappointments on this journey. Each of you has contributed so much to my efforts in this report and I thank you for all of your constant support.

Introduction

This report has a focus and emphasis on serving nontraditional students. This special population has had multiple names throughout its history and research including nontraditional, adult student, and commuter students. The research and information about nontraditional students does not strictly pertain to four-year, public institutions, but rather is a combination of public and private four-year institutions, community colleges, and commuter campuses where nontraditional students can be found. These students are a quickly growing population and universities can benefit from re-creating and re-structuring the university mission to match the lifelong learning requirements that are being put into place by the workforce. No longer are employees staying at one company for many years, but rather are almost “self-employed” as they move from one opportunity to the next to build their professional careers. Many nontraditional students have experienced this change or have other outside factors that have allowed them to return to college. As more students who are considered “nontraditional” come to campus, institutions are going to be tasked with building and creating a community of learners that can overcome the barriers and challenges that they face in college, at home, and in their work. Centers have been used on university campuses to help provide a space, place, and sense of community for underrepresented and marginalized students on campus. A nontraditional center, similar to a multicultural center, would be an ideal community for nontraditional students as they continue to grow in size. Their needs, motives, and persistence are all different from their traditional counterparts and a center would provide a one-stop resource that can help nontraditional students to persist and ultimately graduate.

Growing Population of Nontraditional Students

The growing population of nontraditional students suggests that current enrollment trends are far different from what they used to be. As this population continues to increase administrators, faculty, and staff will need to create better ways of getting students involved and to feel more connected to campus (Wyatt, 2011). This is an area of research that has not been well studied and if retention and nontraditional student success is to continue, barriers to higher education as well as the needs and levels of engagement will need to be addressed and researched. A nontraditional center would provide a holistic solution to not only address these factors, but also allow for more research and data collection to take place since the population would be centralized on campus. Currently, the trend is to separate students into two categories: traditional and nontraditional. There is a large difference in how these two groups of students view higher education. In terms of academics, nontraditional students enjoy classes and homework more, but had a more difficult time balancing multiple life roles (Dill & Henley, 1998). Traditional students were found to worry more about their school performance, but also had less life responsibilities, which allowed them to put more effort and energy into their studies (Choy, 2002). Socially, programs provided by institutions, had a much greater impact on traditional students, while nontraditional students reported that they had more responsibilities at home limiting their level of involvement (Choy, 2002).

Traditional Student Characteristics

A traditional student is characterized as someone who earns a high school diploma, enrolls full time immediately after finishing high school, depends on their parents (or natural guardian) for financial support, and may work part time or not at all (Choy, 2002). These are the students that are considered in retention and current graduation rates and most closely focused on

by current administrators, faculty, and staff. The problem with this focus is that there is a large population of students that are being left out of the enrollment patterns. As the population of nontraditional students continues to grow, researchers will need to evaluate current strategies for traditional students and see what works best or needs to be improved upon for nontraditional students.

Defining Nontraditional Students

Research generally defines nontraditional students as anyone who has not followed a continuous educational path into college (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011). Oftentimes, when evaluating the demographics of nontraditional students, age and part-time status is used; however, the 2002 special report by the National Center for Education Statistics provided by Choy defines a nontraditional student as anyone who displays at least one of the following:

- Delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school);
- Attends part time for at least part of the academic year;
- Works full time (35 hours or more per week) while enrolled;
- Is considered financially independent for purposes of determining eligibility for financial aid;
- Has dependents other than a spouse (usually children, but sometimes others);
- Is a single parent (either not married or married but separated and has dependents); or
- Does not have a high school diploma (completed high school with a GED or other high school completion certificate or did not finish high school).

Although 2002 appears to be an older “definition” for nontraditional students, this description encompasses a wide net of different types of students, but puts them all under one branch of

being “nontraditional.” Other terminology used to describe nontraditional students in the literature includes commuter (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Brown-Sica, 2012; Fairchild, 2003; Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Krause, 2007) or adult (Compton, Cox, & Lannan, 2006; Hardin, 2008; Nitri, 1999; Ritt, 2008; Spitzer, 2000) students. More recent research, has developed a definition of nontraditional students using common characteristics that they all share including: (a) dropped out of school early and may lack educational qualifications, (b) have been outside of the academic environment for some time, (c) does not have previous experience in higher education, and (d) may come from low economic and social groups (Baptista, 2013). These characteristics combined with the 2002 definition leads to a wide, dynamic group of students who have different types of needs than their traditional counterparts, while also having differing engagement, persistence, and degree completion challenges that will alter strategies to assist this population.

History of Nontraditional Students

Although the nontraditional group is one of the fastest growing special populations in higher education today, institutions cannot forget that “atypical” students have been around the higher education system for a long time. As far back as the late 19th century, nontraditional or atypical students have been drawn to the doors of colleges and all that they have to offer (Ogren, 2003). State normal schools are at the forefront of assisting nontraditional students with their education and helping them to become engaged, educated, prosperous citizens. The history of normal schools began when teacher education became a necessity and these schools took on the mission of preparing young professionals to become teachers.

By the early 20th century (1901 – 1920), women began to enroll into the normal school systems and there was also an influx of segregated (and non-segregated) schools that provided

affordable access to students of color including African Americans and Native Americans (Ogren, 2003). Institutions began to see that needs were different for these students and that their missions and ways of engagement in the classroom would have to change to educate these students. The findings show that there are many similarities between current nontraditional students and atypical students from the 20th century. Both enrollment patterns show a continuous growth in women, minorities, and low-socioeconomic status students. Many of these students are older than the traditional 18 – 24 years old and are also financially independent.

To engage nontraditional students, normal schools incorporated students into the everyday academic curriculum (Ogren, 2003). Administrators and faculty of the time encouraged students to engage in intellectual life and taught them how to move beyond their underserved background. They believed that college should be both affordable and accessible to all students, regardless of their backgrounds. Schools made the experience for nontraditional students easier by beginning with the admissions process. The schools had low admissions standards that allowed more students to be able to attend. Once students were accepted, there would be a main point of contact for the nontraditional students to ask questions. The college would send detailed instructions on how to get to campus and would provide individual assistance for these students to become settled. They had one person to help them set up classes and speak with them about their challenges and struggles. Financial aid and scholarships were also available to these students to help them with their educational expenses. These students oftentimes worked during their semesters and it was not uncommon for students to attend “part time” or “stop out” for a semester, so they could work and then come back to school when they had enough money to attend again. This is similar to many nontraditional students today who

are struggling in their new role as a student, while trying to maintain their financial independence combined with other life role responsibilities.

Academically, the curriculum within the normal schools incorporated nontraditional students by having faculty understand their backgrounds and reach out to students who needed extra help (Ogren, 2003). Faculty members believed that the maturity nontraditional students brought to the classroom was not a hindrance, but rather an added value to the intellectual classroom experience. These students oftentimes engaged in literary societies where essay and debate competitions were held. Students not only gained valuable academic experiences in the classroom, but also engaged in social aspects of college life while improving their academics. As the century stretched into the mid-20th century, normal schools began to seek more prestige; as a result, nontraditional students were no longer at the forefront of the mission statement and began to take a back seat to pursuing status.

From the late 20th century to the present, a host of political, economic, and societal changes have taken place that have contributed to the diversity within the higher education system once again (Ogren, 2003). Nontraditional students are no longer on the back burner of higher education and cannot be ignored. After World War II in the 1940's, a flood of veterans swarmed to higher education institutions to seek degrees and use their GI Bill benefits (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Institutions were forced to adapt their mission to again work with a nontraditional population, who had different needs than their traditional counterparts. By the 1960's governmental and institutional financial aid and affirmative action policies explicitly promoted underserved groups (women, minorities, low socioeconomic students) for the first time. This showed institutions that this population would continue to grow within their enrollment and it is a trend that has not changed sense. Today's nontraditional students attend

institutions because of the organizational restructuring and technology change within the work place (Brown, 2002). Adults can no longer plan on spending their entire working lives with one organization and have had to become lifelong learners to maintain their professional prowess.

Each generation is affected differently by employment restructuring and technology advances. Generation X, 80 million young men and women born between 1961 and 1981, are being advised to continuously update their skills, look ahead at market trends, and evaluate what the current demands of the workplace are to see if their skills match up (Brown, 2002). If students find their knowledge and skills lacking, they turn towards higher education to help educate them. Baby Boomers are another generation that has been significantly impacted by this new trend of employment mobility. The 70 million individuals born between 1946 and 1964 are not only dealing with the same concerns of Generation X, but they are also struggling with skill obsolescence, age discrimination, and lack of experience with current technology. Many of the people within these generations may experience “third age,” the period of life beyond a person’s career job and parenting and can last for up to 30 years. These older people still want to work after their retirement, have longer life spans, and are in better health, which allow them to go back to school and develop their skills. This phenomenon of nontraditional student growth encompasses so many different aspects of the American population and yet each one has a common goal in mind: to obtain a degree in higher education that allows them to enhance or improve their overall quality of living.

Although this is an incredible challenge and burden for institutions, it is also an opportunity (Brown, 2002; Ogren, 2003). Colleges and universities across the country must hasten to develop lifelong learning experiences for the vast number of nontraditional students who are arriving in ever increasing numbers. Due to the size and scope of many institutions

today, a fully inclusive curriculum and multiple support services that cater to every nontraditional students' need may not be possible. A nontraditional center could provide this inclusive environment that provides access to an underserved population of students. This center's mission would be a reflection of the small, normal schools past mission of engaging, supporting, and providing access for all students, including the nontraditional population.

Barriers and Challenges to Success

The needs and means to keep nontraditional students engaged are very different from traditional students. Although each student is unique in their nontraditional characteristics, many of these students share common traits (Fairchild, 2003; Wyatt, 2011). Oftentimes, these students are on campus for academic, not social purposes, and therefore do not normally become involved in student organizations and also have a different social circle that is not associated with the college. They also do not usually live on campus and must navigate college independently without parental support. These students are also financially independent and thus have more motivation towards academics because they are paying for it themselves. They also believe that they will see a return in investment for their time, money, and effort spent towards earning a degree. These common traits make it easier to identify barriers that could inhibit a nontraditional student's success. Once barriers have been identified, it is important for institutions to address these barriers as they threaten the success of nontraditional students and prevent them from meeting their academic, professional, and personal goals (Hardin, 2008). A nontraditional center would provide a physical space and support that would enhance nontraditional students' experiences and help them to overcome the barriers that challenge their success while enrolled in higher education.

Barriers are caused by multiple roles and demands placed on nontraditional students as they have many external factors that can affect their success. A nontraditional center would help to break down or eliminate these barriers and could provide powerful resources and strategies to address nontraditional student's needs, keep them engaged, and moved towards success.

Fairchild (2003) has identified three different categories of barriers including: situational, dispositional, and institutional.

Situational barriers include guilt for being away from family and other life role responsibilities (Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008). Other life roles include work as finances are normally sacrificed when nontraditional students enroll into college. Many nontraditional students lack financial support and must find ways to pay for themselves, their education, and in most situations their families. The additional costs of housing and childcare can be overwhelming for students who are already struggling to pay for the added burden, although necessary, of college education. Their work roles, which help provide financial assistance, can also be affected depending on the flexibility or demand of their job responsibilities. A place of business that is less flexible in terms of hours and available time to study could severely inhibit and impact the student's academic success. Situational barriers also inhibit the amount of available time a nontraditional student can be on campus and in turn, their level and degree of involvement with their collegiate environment. These barriers are difficult for institutions to address directly, but a nontraditional center could provide resources to help reduce the impact that this barrier has on students' multiple life roles.

Dispositional barriers for nontraditional students include life role conflicts, role overload due to multidimensional responsibilities, and role contagion or a preoccupation with one competing role over another (Fairchild, 2003). Institutions cannot easily address these barriers,

but assistance can be provided to help manage stress and time management to better balance these roles. A nontraditional center would be able to provide resources and information for students in one comprehensive physical location on campus. Students would know that they are always welcome and can find assistance to overcome dispositional barriers if needed.

Institutional barriers are also an issue for nontraditional students (Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008) and include policies, procedures, and red tape that hinder the progress of nontraditional students. If nontraditional students run across too many of these institutional barriers, they will drop out rather than continue dealing with the added, unnecessary stress. Many institutions are not structured to accommodate these students as office and class hours of faculty and staff does not match well. Many institutions do not consider that the involvement levels of traditional students are very different from nontraditional students and also do not consider that these students can develop and grow if engaged properly while enrolled in higher education. A nontraditional center would provide the support necessary to address these institutional barriers and could address many of the issues surrounding the factors that inhibit a nontraditional student's success and growth.

More recently, educational and psychological barriers have been identified to address the challenges of nontraditional students (Hardin, 2008). Educational barriers include nontraditional students who are not prepared academically to attend higher education. Oftentimes, these students are attending higher education at a later point in their life due to poor circumstances or in some cases, poor decisions that impacted their academic futures. Some students did not take the necessary high school courses that would prepare them for higher education, they chose a different path career path after high school other than postsecondary education, and/or have been out of the academic setting for an extended period of time. It is imperative that institutions focus

on nontraditional students' academic deficiencies in order to assist them in their pursuit of educational attainment. A nontraditional center could provide the resources for the gap in education through programming that targets nontraditional student's study habits, time management, and other academic deficiencies as well as a space that supports adult higher education learning and success.

Psychological barriers are the last challenge to be addressed for nontraditional students (Hardin, 2008). These barriers include poor stress coping skills, a lack of self-confidence and self-image, anxiety about academics, and negative beliefs or expectations about their higher education experience. These psychological barriers encompass the challenge that nontraditional students must face when managing the stress of their everyday life. Research has shown that greater emotional (acceptance, encouragement, praise) and institutional support (financial, childcare, and housing) can reduce the stress on this population (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Hardin, 2008). In a study performed by Giancola and colleagues in 2009 on adult students dealing with stress, three domains of stress were identified: perceived role demands, interrole conflict, and additional responsibilities. The results of the study indicated that how students psychologically evaluated these domains of stress, either positively or negatively impacted their overall levels of well-being and life satisfaction. Students who used positive appraisal for their stress had several techniques that they utilized to be successful. Positive reinterpretation of events or scenarios (this is a positive challenge in my life), strong social support (family, peer, and institutional), active coping strategies (lead to constructive, healthy psychosocial and physical outcomes), and planning all contributed to better outcomes for nontraditional students. The outcomes of positive well-being and life satisfaction are important for nontraditional students, because they are beneficial to their psychological and

academic performance (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). As nontraditional students balance multiple roles of student, family, and work these two variables must be high in order to deal with additional stressors of life and persist to graduation. To combat additional stressors, external resources, such as social support, are necessary for the overall well-being and life satisfaction of students (Hardin, 2008; Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). Social support has been shown to minimize stress and is predictive of well-being and adjustment. Social support can come in many different forms including faculty, family, and friends. This type of social support helps to lower stress and increase the confidence and overall abilities of a nontraditional student to balance their multiple life roles and face challenges. The challenges and stress that coincide with enrollment at an institution can wear on the psychological and academic outcomes of nontraditional students, but with proper support and encouragement, success is possible. Institutions must remember that nontraditional students can become easily isolated on campus unless they have opportunities to interact with others who have similar interests and manage multiple roles (Hardin, 2008). A nontraditional center would provide the necessary social support, while also easing the burden of the different barriers that are included in the challenges that nontraditional students face. Although these students have various needs and barriers that can inhibit their success, they also have strong motivators for obtaining a degree that help them to be successful.

Motivations to Attend College

Nontraditional students attend college for a number of social, economic, and personal growth reasons. In order to assist these students through the creation of a nontraditional center, institutions must first look at the students' motives to attend college and why, despite their many obstacles, nontraditional students are increasing at a rapid pace (Austin, 2006; Banks, 2010; Baptista, 2013; Choy, 2002). The personal motivations vary amongst nontraditional students,

but overall they each have a clear focus on purpose when entering an institution. Many students believe that despite the time, financial, and academic challenges enrollment is rewarding (Austin, 2006; Baptista, 2013) as it increases their personal knowledge, career skills, and competencies. These motivations are confirmed by the human capital theory, which suggests that individuals consider returning or entering higher education because they are willing to invest their time and money to gain marketable skills for their careers (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). A nontraditional student's decision to attend or continue his or her enrollment within higher education depends largely on whether the expected outcome outweighs the costs. This is critical for nontraditional students wanting to enroll into higher education, because they are highly motivated to be successful despite their barriers and challenges. Nontraditional students have three different types of motivation to attend higher education including personal, professional, and social (Baptista, 2013).

Personal motivations can vary from identity development to an enhancement in overall self-esteem (Baptista, 2013). For many students, it is a dream come true to be enrolled in higher education and provides many new challenges and knowledge that were unattainable before.

Nontraditional students with children also believe that their enrollment fostered their children's pride in them while enhancing their interest in education (Austin, 2006; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005) and improving their lives financially (Baptista, 2013). Professional motivations for nontraditional students returning to the workforce include a wish to improve work performance, gain knowledge and insight into new professional demands and standards, and many want to pursue a degree to add to their professional work experience. Many students believe that if they attend college, it will provide them with better opportunities for employment as well as better careers. These motivations allow students to be more likely to persist through graduation

(Brown, 2002). The students who are most likely to graduate are those who perceive that the outcome of a college degree (e.g. grades, career options) will represent a fair exchange for their time, effort, and money invested. The final motivator is social. Many nontraditional students have a desire and commitment to educate society and enhance their own citizenship. Oftentimes, these students are also life-long learners who wish to improve themselves and believe that education is a right for everyone. These motivators drive nontraditional students regardless of the challenges they face and barriers they must overcome, while also helping to enhance their overall engagement while enrolled within institutions.

Theoretical Foundations

There have not been many theoretical frameworks that have been created specifically for nontraditional students. This will need to be an area for future research and study, but there are still several well-known theorists who have adapted their models to better suite nontraditional students. Nontraditional students have several conditions found (or not found) in the college environment that can have a major impact on their growth and development including challenge and support, involvement, marginality and mattering, and validation (Chaves, 2006; Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2010). Adult learning theory and literature related to adult student identity development will also be addressed in this theoretical framework, since they are important aspects of nontraditional student growth while enrolled in higher education.

Rendon's Theory of Validation

When Rendon's validation theory first surfaced as a framework for nontraditional student development, it was used to create an inclusive campus environment at community colleges (Gupton, Castelo-Rodriguez, Martinez, & Quintanar, 2009). Students' experience validation when a confirming, supportive, and enabling process is initiated in and out of the classroom and

fosters academic and social development (Chaves, 2006; Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

Nontraditional students will need to be provided with active forms of validation in order to have a successful college career. Professionals and faculty can create these validating experiences in the programs and curriculum that are created to target this population of students. These experiences must start as soon as the student is enrolled into an institution because validation assists with student confidence, ability to learn, self-efficacy, and a belief that they have something to offer to the institution. A nontraditional center would provide validation outside of the classroom, since students would feel that they belonged to a space and were accepted amongst other like-minded peers. This feeling of validation is instrumental in helping nontraditional students be successful (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 2000).

Mattering

Another issue that many nontraditional and traditional students encounter is the feeling of not mattering on campuses. The need to matter is a critical dimension for students as they experience new transitions and experiences in their lives. In 1989 Schlossberg and colleagues referred to mattering as the belief that a person matters to some else, is the object of someone's attention, and that others care and appreciate them. This feeling of mattering for nontraditional students is more likely to keep them engaged in learning and motivated to continue attending college regardless of their barriers and multiple life roles (Schlossberg, Lynch, & Chickering, 1989). Rosenberg, the original creator of mattering, suggested that there are five dimensions of mattering and they are also pertinent for nontraditional students (Schlossberg et al., 1989).

Attention is the most elementary form of mattering and is the feeling that one commands interest or notice of another person. Importance is another dimension and it means that nontraditional students are the objects of a person's concern and that they care about what nontraditional

students want, think, and do. Dependence is the third dimension, and is the belief that others depend on the nontraditional student. Ego-extension is when nontraditional students feel that others will be proud of their accomplishments and disappointed by the failures. The last dimension is appreciation. This is when nontraditional students perceive that others are thankful for who they are and have an appreciation what they do. To assist nontraditional students in each of these dimensions of mattering, a center would provide the necessary stage to feel that they mattered on campus. Studying spaces, communication boards, convenient office hours, peer mentoring groups, and many other aspects of mattering can be incorporated into the center to help nontraditional students feel that they are a part of campus and to guide students in being successful.

Schlossberg's Transition Model

Using Nancy Schlossberg's transition model, researchers can analyze nontraditional student transitions (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012; Schlossberg et al., 1989). This framework can assess where a student is at in their learning process regardless of status and determines what resources the student is using to cope with the transition. Schlossberg (2011) identified transition into three different categories: (a) anticipated transitions are major life events we usually expect such as getting married or becoming a parent, (b) unanticipated transitions include disruptive events that occur unexpectedly, and (c) nonevent transitions are expected events that fail to occur such as not getting a promotion you were expecting. Regardless of the type of transition, these events alter someone's roles, relationships, routines, and assumptions (Schlossberg et al., 1989). Nontraditional students return to school for a number of different motivational reasons and regardless of the reason why, their roles, routines, relationships at home, in the community, and the education setting will affect their transition.

By evaluating nontraditional students' transitions, staff and faculty will have a better understanding of how to provide for their needs as most of their lives have drastically changed. It is important to remember that transitions take time and people's reactions to change occur during this time (Schlossberg, 2011). A nontraditional student who has experienced these shifts in roles will take time to adjust and institutions must begin the helping process immediately in order to assist them through their transition. Schlossberg's (2011) 4S's Model can be used to assist students in coping with their transitions. This model is broken into four categories: situation, self, supports, and strategies. The situation refers to the situation that a person is in during the time of transition. Evaluating needs, barriers, and motivations for entering college will all be necessary to guide a student's transition. The self is the person's inner ability to cope with the situation. The person's self-efficacy, intrinsic motivation, and attributes are all essential pieces of the self. Supports are the available systems of support during the time of transition and are critical to someone's well-being. For nontraditional students these support systems are their families, work, and peer networks that will ultimately provide them with the encouragement necessary to stay motivated and engaged in college. Finally, strategies are the coping mechanisms used to assist with the situation. Certain strategies help to change the situation, some reframe the situation, and others help reduce stress. There is not one particular strategy that works best, but combining multiple coping mechanisms can better assist a person in their transition. Using the 4S model can be valuable when assessing how well nontraditional students are doing in their new environments and providing strategies that can promote their success. A nontraditional center could utilize Schlossberg's transition model to advise students who come into the center. Center staff would be able to meet students where they are at in their particular

situation. Each student is unique and it is difficult to find a one size fits all model, so this would be an ideal framework to guide practices.

Adult Learning Theory

Adult learning theory must be discussed as a great deal of research currently views nontraditional students through the theoretical framework of traditional student development theories (Kasworm, 2005). The theory originated from the organizational development field and primarily focused on learning theory that helps to provide employees with necessary tools to perform better in the workplace (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). Knowles (1974), a researcher who has investigated adult learning theory using the organizational development field research, identified four principles to characterize adult learners including: (a) students are self-directed in that they take responsibility for their own actions, (b) students have an extensive depth of experiences, which shape the foundation of adult students self-identity, (c) students are ready to learn and are actively engaged in their learning process as most have voluntarily returned to higher education, and (d) students are task motivated while appearing to be extremely intrinsically motivated and have a specific goal in mind upon entering college (Knowles, 1974, 1984). These four principles will be a useful guide for practitioners who work with nontraditional students in any capacity.

When applying the adult learning theory to practice, there are three metacognitive frameworks, (1) tactic theory, (2) informal theory, and (3) formal theory, which are used to identify how people structure their own learning theories (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011; Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Formal theory is a theoretical framework is used by academics to generate new knowledge when applying complex theoretical frameworks to their research. Formal theory is rare and not often used, so this report will only focus on tactic and informal theory. Within the

tactic theory, adult learners gain metacognitive skills through their interactions with peers, professors, and the local culture. Research has shown that it is difficult for adult learners to change their metacognitive skills within tactic theory, but if their behavior is patterned after successful members within their peer group, they are more likely to have positive learning experiences (Kenner & Weinerman, 2011). A nontraditional center would help to create positive interactions within the collegiate environment and provide peer role models who nontraditional students can utilize on their journey to obtain a degree. Informal theory is one step up on the metacognitive scale and describes how learners possess recognition of their metacognition. These types of learners still acquire skills from their peers and environment over time, but are also more conscious of their metacognitive framework and how they are processing information (Schraw & Moshman, 1995). Informal metacognitive strategies usually develop in the workplace environment, and most peers recognize these skills as a sign of intelligence, experience, and reflection. When applying theory to practice, it is well known by researchers that one component leading to the attrition of nontraditional students is the lack of successful integration into the institution (Clark, 2006; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007; Lundberg, 2003). A nontraditional center would have many different types of nontraditional learners within its physical space and students could learn from one another's metacognitive frameworks to help improve their own skills. This environment of learning is crucial not only for students to do well and graduate, but also develop within their own personal identity as an adult student.

Adult Student Identity

The final theoretical framework that must be examined is how adult students develop their identity. Many current frameworks only view nontraditional students through a traditional

student development lens and do not take into account the complex maturation and experiences that shape a nontraditional student's identity (Kasworm, 2005). Kasworm's (2005) study explored adult identity development through co-constructed understandings of the cultural and social identities that occur in an adults figured world. Figured worlds reflect the multiple roles of nontraditional students and how their identity is formed based off of their life complexities. This study used the connected classroom as a metaphor to represent the intersecting roles of a nontraditional student's academic and social lives coming together in one place for learning. A nontraditional center would be similar to this classroom metaphor as it provides an academic environment that is still social and interactive in nature. The findings of this study revealed two types of identities that are developed by nontraditional students (Kasworm, 2005).

The first type of identity is positional identity, which involves students determining what the age-appropriate societal norms of involvement in college include, beliefs in academic competence, and their perceived vision of the ideal student (Kasworm, 2005). The ideal student is an image created by nontraditional students that identifies the different elements necessary to be successful in the academic role. These students believe that the ideal student makes a serious commitment to their college studies and works hard to achieve their goals. They also view college as a life choice; so nontraditional students are more confident about their studies and less inhibited in their academics because of their strong commitment and choice to return to college. The ideal student also uses past experiences to support and enhance their successes within the institution. These past experiences also make students more resilient and able to cope in a positive way when stress arises. The ideal student also has certain beliefs and behaviors of what the ideal academic student should be doing, and students attempt to meet those perceived characteristics and beliefs.

The second adult student identity formed is relational. This identity focuses on the relationship aspect of a student's college experiences and looks at identifying positive faculty relationships, nontraditional peer relationships, and positive relationships with younger students (Kasworm, 2005). Each relationship is different, but connects the student further to campus, allowing them to feel part of the institution and environment. The findings also indicate and confirm that there is not one single adult student identity as each student has a different complex and dynamic set of roles. This is important for institutions to understand, as they cannot necessarily use the same strategies for academic and social enhancement as traditional students. These two identities are meant to provide a positive growth model for nontraditional students, so that they don't feel that they are taking a risk by returning to higher education. A center would assist in overcoming these feelings, while providing a support system for students. The center would help to improve their self-worth and feelings of belonging to campus. Belonging and mattering is an important aspect of being successful in college and a center would allow students to feel that they matter, while at the same time improve their academic and psychological performance and outcomes (Schlossberg, et al., 1989).

These theoretical frameworks explain nontraditional students' multiple identities development, struggles in their multiple roles, and reasons for returning to higher education and persisting to graduation. These theoretical frameworks confirm the importance of research on the barriers and challenges that nontraditional students face, while also identifying their motives for enrolling at institutions. Practitioners will benefit from applying these theoretical frameworks to their work with nontraditional students.

Promoting Nontraditional Student Success

Nontraditional students' ability to succeed rests on their perceptions of the barriers, challenges, and obligations faced, their persistence and chosen strategies in overcoming the various obstacles, and the confidence in their own abilities to succeed (Clark, 2006). This section will highlight the identifying predictors of academic success, the persistence and retention of nontraditional students, how to develop and keep engagement, and the importance of social interactions and community in the collegiate environment. It is important for staff working within the nontraditional center to understand these different ways to promote nontraditional student success.

Predictors of Academic Success

Nontraditional students can find success at virtually any institution that they decide to attend. Predictors of success can vary from traditional to nontraditional students, and each institution must be willing to explore and address what each particular population of students needs to be successful. In turn, students are more likely to have institutional commitment, which incorporates social integration, social support, and overall well-being (Tinto, 1998). These characteristics affect students' academics and overall performance both physically and psychologically. This also ties into stress and how students cope with their challenging and stressful situations. A nontraditional center would allow students to be provided with the resources and support necessary for them to commit to the institution. This is important because it creates a feeling of attachment and mattering to the institution (Brown, 2002). Nontraditional students are more likely to be retained and graduate if they feel this connection.

When looking into predictors of college success, academic performance is always to the forefront of research because this is one way institutions can measure and assess success. The

highlighted predictors of college success for traditional students include self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Multon, Brown & Lent, 1991; Spitzer, 2000), intrinsic motivation, self-regulation (Schunk, 1994; Spitzer, 2000; Zimmerman, 1994) and social support (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russel, 1994; Spitzer, 2000). Students who have positive self-efficacy show greater cognitive effort, intrinsic motivation, persistence, and self-regulation in their academic performance (Bandura, 1997; Schunk, 1994; Spitzer, 2000). Students who have intrinsic motivation usually perform better academically in the classroom and are more likely to persist, choose more challenging activities, invest greater efforts into their assignments, and actively learn while in the classroom (Spitzer, 2000; Zimmerman, 1994). Self-regulation is another critical component of academic performance and success. Self-regulation has three components including: (a) behavioral: actively control student resources (time, study environment, use of peers and faculty resources), (b) motivational and affective: control and change motivational beliefs (self-efficacy, emotional reactions), and (c) cognitive: control of cognitive learning strategies (organizing, rehearsing, and deep processing) (Spitzer, 2000; Zimmerman, 1994). These elements are useful not only in predicting academic performance, but also in identifying strategies to best serve and help nontraditional students find success. Each of the variables can be identified as predictors of success for nontraditional students. A nontraditional center would be able to help grow these variables that predict success. Direct instruction, workshops, and resources would be made available to guide students and assist them in their academic performance and overall success.

Supporting Persistence and Degree Completion

Many institutions are now more focused on nontraditional students and creating initiatives that foster college adjustment and improve persistence of nontraditional students

(Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). As the population has grown, university leaders have realized that they must retain these students. Variation and ability in academic performance contributes greatly to persistence and ultimately degree completion with both traditional and nontraditional students (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Students who have lower precognitive abilities are less likely to succeed in higher education, and because many nontraditional students are already at a disadvantage based off of their previous academic choices, it is critical that institutions provide the support necessary for persistence and degree completion. In order to support students, institutions will need to address the barriers that nontraditional students face as well as the cognitive gaps that can occur among individual nontraditional students. Many universities now have First-Year Experience courses that target either traditional students or different groups and special populations (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). These programs are designed to assist in student persistence and degree completion. A nontraditional center could utilize the concept and research provided by First Year Experience courses to help design free, open seminar courses that nontraditional students could attend and learn about a wide range of topics including: academic skills development and test taking strategies, wellness and stress issues, and other academically focused workshops (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). Other aspects of the center could provide professional development for faculty who are meant to engage nontraditional students in the classroom. Workshops could be developed that focus on multi-modal learning styles, and different strategies that can be implemented in the classroom not only to engage nontraditional students but also to engage their traditional counterparts. These types of engagement styles will be discussed in the next section but must be addressed as faculty and their teaching methods are an important aspect of student persistence and degree completion. If inadequate attention is paid to faculty preparation, involvement, and consistency in course

content, the value of first year seminar courses can become diminished (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). A nontraditional center could help to support students' cognitive ability by providing peer tutoring groups, workshops on advancing study skills and habits, and how to learn and be engaged in the classroom.

Engagement of Nontraditional Students

Engagement measures the time and energy devoted to academic activities and how students perceive the support of their learning in the academic environment (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). The biggest challenge that institutions often face is helping students find a balance with their academic and external commitments that allows them to reach levels of engagement to achieve academic success. In order to achieve engagement of nontraditional learners, stakeholders must be invested in the process to create an environment of success (Wyatt, 2011). The institution must commit to wanting success for these students and leaders must be vested in assisting nontraditional students. Faculty must also be able to understand nontraditional student learning styles and realize that they bring maturity and experience into the classroom that traditional students cannot provide. Staff needs to also understand nontraditional student factors and barriers in order to provide the resources necessary to assist this population. Counselors will need to be trained in advising and be able to understand the struggles that nontraditional students have. Besides stakeholders, curricula will need to be created that are flexible and considerate of nontraditional external factors in order to motivate and engage students. Programs and services will need to attract and appeal to nontraditional students by being family friendly and focused on their needs and ways to assist them with their many barriers. Finally, communication both on and off campus must be easily accessible and identifiable in order to engage students and provide them with resources. Engagement of

nontraditional students is a critical component of their success and stakeholders must begin to assess their campuses to insure that they are adequately providing for all of their students. A nontraditional center could help promote these types of engagement components and create an environment of success and support for nontraditional students.

Social Interactions and Campus Community

Throughout this critical review and analysis, social interactions and support have seemed to be the most common thread throughout the research that holds nontraditional student success together (Clark, 2006; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007; Lundberg, 2003). These students are in need of a different type of social interaction and community support than their traditional counterparts. When nontraditional students invest in non-classroom relationships, the more likely they are to continue in their education and ultimately graduate (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). Oftentimes, nontraditional students are already investing a lot of their limited time available into the classroom and not in the social interactions outside of the classroom. Students who do are more likely to succeed, as the social aspect of education is likely to build a student's identity and help them to grow (Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007). Students who make connections outside of the classroom also stand a higher chance of feeling a part of the learning community as a whole (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). There are two types of social interaction on campus: student to student and student to administrator or faculty (Krause, 2007). These types of relationships assist in students being socially involved in the campus community. Social involvement plays a key role in the quality of the higher education experience and in helping students to be engaged with the campus experience. Both types of social interactions can be integrated into the nontraditional center, which would ultimately help with persistence, graduation completion, and success within the institution.

Student-to-Student Support

Studies on student-to-student support, which include nontraditional students as participants, have shown the benefits of peer learning (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Lundberg, 2003) and educational peer relationships. Lundberg's (2003) study provides supporting evidence that adds value to peer learning outside of the classroom. Peer relationships are an important aspect of the social interactions and community building on campus. Peer interactions that are educationally focused are a strong predictor of student learning. Due to the educational focus, students appear to increase their effort and investment in learning in both a group setting and individually. Although nontraditional students have limited time to gather or meet with peers in a social setting, a nontraditional center could provide a physical space during school hours where students can meet and interact with their nontraditional peers, discuss educational topics, and engage with one another in an academically social setting. Formal peer learning programs would also need to be included and would incorporate study groups and peer tutoring (Lundberg, 2003).

Administrative and Faculty Support

Besides peer relationships, it has been discovered that the quality of relationships with administrators and faculty is also critical for student success. Administrators who are seen as flexible, considerate, and helpful were rated the highest for quality relationships (Lundberg, 2003). This is important for student affairs professionals to recognize as most administrators fall within the student affairs division and provide services outside of the classroom to help with student learning. If higher education administrators hope to improve the relationships with nontraditional students and provide more support for success, they must be willing to restructure hours, services, and perceptions of nontraditional students (Lundberg, 2003; Schlossberg et al.,

1989). A nontraditional center would provide resources and support for nontraditional students, while also forming powerful relationships outside of the classroom to assist students on their journey towards educational attainment.

Campus Community

In order to achieve supportive relationships where nontraditional students can meet their peers and interact with administrators outside of the classroom, a nontraditional center could provide the space and place for such interactions. In order to shape the characteristics of a nontraditional center, an overview of campus community must first take place.

More recently, campus community has come into the spotlight and is associated with learning, civic purpose, and a sense of belonging (Rullman Van den Kieboom, & Van Jura, 2012). Places that have exceptional community are those that include high levels of student engagement. When students are able to interact with others outside of the classroom, their engagement and learning is enhanced. Within the space there should be evidence of human-to-human interaction, psychological safety and refuge, and a strong sense of individual and group ownership. Based off of the literature review and analysis of nontraditional students, a center would help to not only provide one common place for social interactions, academic improvements, and the support necessary to overcome barriers and challenges, but also a place for students to feel that they are involved, matter, and belong to the campus community.

When creating a physical community space, barriers do exist (Rullman et al., 2012). Oftentimes, campus leaders must be willing to help overcome these barriers including institutional boundaries, navigation of campus politics, or justification for physical place and community. Leadership is critical to overcoming these barriers and providing support for the creation of space that will provide community for groups of students. Despite these barriers, the

rewards of a community space in an increasingly diverse society are many. It is critical that students are able to experience quality socialization including productive interaction and constructive disagreement. It is important to give students opportunities in both intentional and unintentional places to experience the effects of diversity and how to interact with others who have differing views. With nontraditional students' limited time, barriers, and focus on academics, a nontraditional center would merge academic and social interactions in one place and allow students an opportunity to connect, grow, and be successful.

A report from the Associations of College Unions International provided a comprehensive vision for what a college community should look like (Rullman et al., 2012). The eight attributes that were suggested will help guide the principles of an ideal nontraditional center including: (a) engaging: interaction amongst students and staff are visible and it appears that everyone within the space is active, involved, and dynamic, (b) bridging: students who are dissimilar are able to find commonalities, (c) layering: within the place, there are spaces for individuals to take personal refuge until they are ready to move into the larger group dynamics of the space, (d) agency: students should feel a sense of ownership individually, in their relationships, and the physical space, (e) responsive: the space can easily adapt and change throughout the day and over the years, (f) distributed: the space must be decentralized and advertised to optimize access, convenience, scale, refuge, and personalization, (g) deviation: policies and restrictions that could detract from flexibility and agency should be minimal to encourage community, and (h) gestalt: the elements of the space (light, furniture, materials, diversity, sound, location, activities) should reflect a functional space and work together to create a wholeness within the space. These eight guiding principles will be critical to support and guide the characteristics of an ideal center in the best practices section to follow.

A Commuter Student Space Study

Throughout the research for this report, one particular study on space for commuter students stood out. The study focused on creating a space that would be essential for nontraditional students as they had a 99 percent commuter campus (Brown-Sica, 2012). Creating a sense of space is important as it must be designed to promote group studying and collaboration, which is critical for success in today's campus environment (Brown-Sica, 2012). Nontraditional students would be able to study with like-minded peers who have similar schedules and understand each other's time management. The space should also have an individual, contemplative, and quiet space for students who would like to work independently.

Other aspects of the space that were researched and could be a part of the center include: (a) staff who can provide a single point of contact, (b) resources pertaining to nontraditional student needs, (c) mentor opportunities and partnerships, (d) peer tutoring and peer study group opportunities, (e) amenities such as a refrigerator, locker rentals, free tea/coffee available, and a microwave, (f) workshop opportunities such as healthy living, study skills, time management networking, and career planning, and (g) biweekly center informational meetings to keep students updated on scholarship opportunities, events, and other news pertaining to nontraditional students. These elements will all be used for the best practices section to highlight the different components of an ideal center and how to utilize programming, staffing, and the physical space to promote student development, learning, and student success.

Best Practices for Student Affairs Professionals

After analyzing the demographics, history, barriers and challenges, motivations to attend college, useful theoretical frameworks, and components of student success, it can be recommended that a nontraditional center would be an ideal solution to reach out to students and

help them to reach degree attainment. There has been a recent focus on enhancing student learning outside of the classroom, which is the most common domain of student affairs professionals. When student learning is promoted and enhanced both in and out of the classroom, they are more likely to be academically and socially persistent and successful. If practitioners wish to enhance the success and learning of nontraditional students, improvements in administrative relationships and quality of services, as well as developing programs, setting, and services that facilitate positive, working relationships must be implemented (Lundberg, 2003). The relationships with administrators, as well as students and faculty, are a critical aspect of nontraditional student development and persistence (Clark, 2006; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007; Lundberg, 2003). Each of these components can be incorporated into a nontraditional center and provides one comprehensive, multidimensional solution. The best practices section highlights strategies to be used in the center to contribute towards student development and success, examples of colleges who currently have centers, and the ideal characteristics of a nontraditional center.

Solution: A Nontraditional Center

In order to create the ideal characteristics of a nontraditional center while also promoting student learning, strategies for student affairs practitioners must first be discussed. At the institutional level an understanding and recognition of the unique characteristics of nontraditional students should be evident. It is crucial to establish a number of services to support nontraditional students in their transitions, while also helping staff that work with nontraditional students to feel empowered to assist this population. Finally, providing opportunities for social integration and peer learning will not only contribute to the development

of nontraditional students, but also enhance the different components of nontraditional student success.

Recognize Unique Characteristics

In order to achieve maximum effectiveness within the center, institutions and staff must recognize the unique characteristics of nontraditional students (Brown, 2002; Wyatt, 2011). Practitioners must understand the nontraditional cultural perspective and create a sense of community on campus. This is critical for advocacy and getting to incorporate a different perspective on institutional policies, procedures, and requirements that may impact nontraditional students differently than their counterparts. Having a more family oriented, flexible campus (Clark, 2006; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wyatt, 2011) will go a long way in creating a more inclusive atmosphere for nontraditional students as they have many roles besides being a student that makes up their adult identity. This includes allowing families to come to different on-campus events, especially orientation (Austin, 2006; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wyatt, 2011), to help adult students feel welcome and a part of campus. Mattering and a sense of belonging are important during the nontraditional student's time of transition when they are moving into their new role as a student. It allows students to feel more involved socially on campus and will in turn guide students to begin creating a support network. A nontraditional center could be utilized as a pre-enrollment resource with staff that understand and work with nontraditional students on a regular basis. Orientation programs can clarify concerns for nontraditional students and make them feel as if they are receiving more individualized attention. Orientation is a critical pre-enrollment phase because "one size fits all" models do not normally work for nontraditional students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The center would be included in any campus tours or admissions visits as well as orientation events. At the orientation, a real

discussion on the level of time commitment and energy needed to be successful in higher education as well as course expectations and requirements (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002) should be included in the program. This would help to clarify any concerns or issues that a nontraditional student might have (Austin, 2006) as well as connect them not only to the center, but other resources that will help them in their multiple roles and guide them through their transitions.

Establishing Services

Establishing a number of services that meet multiple needs of nontraditional students (Austin, 2006; Baptista, 2013; Brown, 2002; Wyatt, 2011) is necessary on any campus that enrolls adult learners. This includes a single point of contact (Austin, 2006), located in a nontraditional center, where students know that they can always go for guidance and support. Other services, such as the counseling center, should be equipped with well trained professionals who understand the barriers and challenges of nontraditional students and can assist them in reducing their stress, anxiety, and finding a balance of multiple life roles and responsibilities (Wyatt, 2011). The overall life satisfaction and well-being of students can greatly improve when they feel that they have support and someone to turn to for guidance (Quimby & O'Brien, 2006). Other services that would be useful for nontraditional students are tutoring, writing centers, and computer labs, on campus/off campus childcare, and a career center (Austin, 2006). These services can either be decentralized from the nontraditional center or have different elements of each service incorporated into it. Advisors who specifically work with nontraditional students could also be incorporated as part of the center and provide a supportive, helpful service to students. These advisors would be able to assist with enrollment as well as academic and career goals, while also providing support in the daily operations of the nontraditional center.

Empower Staff

Practitioners who work with nontraditional students should feel empowered to assist this population (Brown, 2002), while being sensitive to the various types of educational backgrounds and needs of students. Nontraditional students have many barriers (Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008) and challenges to degree attainment, but their motivations (Baptista, 2013) clearly drive their ambition and focus in higher education. Recognizing these characteristics changes the campus environment and creates a welcoming, inclusive atmosphere for nontraditional students (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Practitioners should be trained and aware that the multiple roles and relationships of family, work, and academic responsibilities greatly impact an adult student's development and in order to provide the best services possible, staff must realize the stress and pressure a nontraditional student is under. This would also allow staff to feel more comfortable providing effective strategy solutions to nontraditional students (Clark, 2006). Practitioners could provide resources to help students overcome negative concerns or maladaptive practices that are ineffective to combat stress and academics. Being able to ask students' questions about how they are balancing their multiple roles and what types of academic strategies they are using will provide a foundation for the needs of students. A nontraditional center could provide outreach to other departments, faculty, and advisors through professional development trainings that facilitate conversations about nontraditional students and how to effectively serve them within their unit. The center would become main resource for nontraditional students to address many of their concerns and needs.

Provide Social Involvement Opportunities

One of the most critical strategies for promoting nontraditional student success is getting students socially integrated and involved into the college environment. Many nontraditional

students put a great deal of their time and effort into the classroom because they can always control their time and schedule (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011); however, students who invest their time outside of the classroom in social relationships are more likely to succeed (Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007). Opportunities for social interaction and connections outside of the classroom could be provided in a nontraditional center. The more chances given to students to feel connected to the university and its peers, the more likely they are to develop in their identity as well as grow academically (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). As stated a previously, social interaction that has an educational focus appears to enhance the learning process for students both in and out of the classroom (Lundberg, 2003). When students enter into peer relationships and are constantly around other students who have similar characteristics, they can learn a great deal from one another. This diverse body of students would be able to discuss educational topics through informal and formal programs within the nontraditional center. Informally, students would be interacting, discussing, and talking about educationally related topics within the physical space of the center, as it is meant to be a community for all nontraditional students. Formal peer learning opportunities would incorporate peer mentoring programs, tutoring, academic and personal development workshops, support groups, and other event networking opportunities (Clark, 2006) designed by the center's staff to continuously promote social involvement and learning outside of the classroom. These best practices will help to shape the ideal characteristics of a center and provide institutions, as well as readers with a comprehensive list of different strategies that can be utilized within any department or program.

Examples of Established Nontraditional Centers

Weber State University and Utah State University are two institutions that utilize nontraditional centers. Although there are other examples of centers, these two contained the

most information on their websites that will be pertinent to this report. Unfortunately, I was not able to confirm the success of any of the programs or even the center's value to the institution, unless it is listed somewhere on the website. However, I did compare the components listed on the universities website with the literature review and analysis performed from this report to help shape the characteristics of an ideal center.

Weber State University

Weber State University utilizes the physical space of their center to its maximum. Not only do they have a large physical space, but their programming and intentional focus on nontraditional students is displayed everywhere on their webpage (Weber State, 2014). Also, Weber State University provided program review reports on their website that can be used to explain the success and/or purpose of the different elements of their center that I have utilized for this report.

When looking at the physical space using pictures on the website, all of the ideal elements requested by nontraditional students in the research (Brown-Sica, 2012) or stated in the report by the Association of College Unions International (Rullman et al., 2012) are present. All of the elements within the center seem to work together to create a functional wholeness, while also providing opportunities for layering, which provides space for both individual and group purposes (Weber State, 2014). The seating arrangements within the lounge area lead to a highly collaborative environment, where chairs are placed around tables for studying, couches and chairs are arranged in a conversational, flexible style, and the lighting and color schemes provide a wonderful ambience for students. It seems that the elements within the space can be easily moved or manipulated as chairs and tables can be altered, shifted, and are highly mobile. The lounge space is used for a variety of functions from everyday studying and eating to meetings

and event parties (Cragun Newman, & Barrow, 2010). The computer lab contains nine computers. Students must be currently enrolled to utilize the lab. Students are also able to print 40 sheets of paper per week for free. The room is separate from the rest of the center, which leads me to believe that it is meant to be a quiet, individual space. There is also a kitchen, where students can put their lunches or snacks within the refrigerator. There is also a coffee pot, microwave, sink, cabinetry, and many plates and cups. This is ideal space for many nontraditional students as each of these elements are common requests within the literature (Brown-Sica, 2012; Clark, 2006).

There is also an hourly childcare center that has a maximum capacity of 13 children (Cragun et al., 2010). The childcare center charges \$3.20 per hour and is offered Monday through Friday from 6:45 am to 3 pm every day. It is for a child 2-9 years of age, and pre-enrollment is required before students can use the facility (Weber State, 2014). This is an important feature of the center as the research shows that when nontraditional students have childcare taken care of, they are less likely to stress about their multiple roles and can focus on their academics (Austin, 2006; Fairchild, 2003; Giancola et al., 2009; Hardin, 2008). The physical space of the center shows success as many students reported in the program report review that they would like to see even more space and expansion of the childcare center for the growing population of nontraditional students at the university (Cragun et al., 2010).

Technology within the physical space of the center must also be addressed. Besides the computer lab and free printing, there are a number of different technology elements that appear to be essential to the function of the center. Social media such as Facebook is used to connect students using an online platform. Websites such as meetup.com are also being utilized to provide networking opportunities for students. The Weber State website itself is also an

important component of the center (Weber State, 2014). It streamlines all of the resources available for students as well as the programming. It also provides information about childcare hours as well as a virtual tour of the center, videos of nontraditional students highlighting their experiences at Weber State, and many other opportunities and resources. This use of technology further enhances academic and social involvement (Clark, 2006) and improves the overall sense of belonging and connection to the campus environment for nontraditional students.

Weber State University's nontraditional center also incorporates a mission, goals, and outcomes that are pertinent to the center's growth. By providing this information, the university is giving a vision and purpose to the center. The goal is to create a welcoming, friendly and comfortable environment that makes students feel recognized, valued, and connected to the university (Cragun et al., 2010). The purpose of the nontraditional staff is to organize leadership and volunteer opportunities, provide information on enrollment services, to create programming that assists students in overcoming their barriers (e.g. academic challenges, financial, personal, family, technology, career, health) foster a welcoming environment, create formal opportunities for networking, provide moral support and create a safe environment for students to communicate openly. The learning outcomes of the center can be assessed to determine if the center is helping students on their journey toward degree attainment. These outcomes address providing emotional support for nontraditional students, assisting in educational success, creating strong networking opportunities, and supporting the university by helping to improve retention and graduation rates of nontraditional students. The program review shows that the center is meeting their goals and mission as many students report the center being a safe haven and refuge from the demands of campus. It is a place where they can be around like-minded peers and network with others who are in similar situations as themselves. Research has shown that this

type of social interaction and feeling of belonging enhances learning and leads to the success of nontraditional students (Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007; Rullman et al., 2012).

The next section of critical importance is the programming and services provided by the center. Although it did not appear that all program and events were mentioned, a few were highlighted in the report. Weber State has created a literary journal for nontraditional students and its purpose is to provide a venue for talented nontraditional students to share their academic writing and present their work for publication (Cragun et al., 2010). The center also created a Purple Pals Kids Club. The program is not only meant to create a fun, networking environment for the children of nontraditional students, but to also hopefully secure future generations of students to attend Weber State University. The program demonstrates that they are family friendly, inclusive institution. Having a family oriented campus is one way to help nontraditional students feel valued, respected, and a part of the larger campus environment (Jacoby & Garland, 2004).

The center also has strong ties with Pinnacle Honor Society, which is a well established and nationally recognized honorary society for nontraditional students (Weber State, 2014). This society is a great way for nontraditional students to showcase their academic success and leadership qualities. Scholarships are another large part of the programming within the center. Finances are a constant concern for many nontraditional students as most are financially independent (Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wyatt, 2011). The scholarships are awarded based off of financial need. A student resource guide is also provided for nontraditional students, especially for those entering their first year. This is helpful for staff to provide the correct resources for students (Cragun et al., 2010). There is also a nontraditional student senator position that is a part of the student government. This elected representative

voices the views of nontraditional students. Within the programming, there is also a significant amount of outreach and campus collaboration.

The staff within the center provides presentations to tutoring services, during orientation and recruitment, and other professionals and/or departments on campus to spread advocacy of nontraditional students and to explain the different ways that nontraditional students learn as well as the different barriers and challenges that they face (Cragun et al., 2010). This improves the campus climate for nontraditional students and creates a sense of understanding that is critical for nontraditional success (Brown, 2002; Wyatt, 2011). Other elements of outreach include workshops and activities that meet the diverse needs of their student populations (Cragun et al., 2010). Advertising is also essential and includes placement of activities and events on the calendar, campus marquee, bulletins, and student newspaper. Banners are also used for advertisement and to highlight the center itself. Other forms of advertisement include posters, activity cards with semester long events, newsletters, and postcards. These multiple strategies of advertisement allow more outreach to students, faculty, and staff who may not know about the center and its services.

Staffing and leadership within the center also must be discussed. Staffing includes a coordinator, secretary, childcare supervisor, part time advisor, childcare assistants, office aides, and peer advisors (Cragun et al., 2010). The coordinator, supervisor, and secretary are all full time, salaried professionals. These staff members are essential for the function of the center. The advisor has a strong understanding of the barriers and challenges that nontraditional students face and is able to assist with any academic issues that a student may be having. This understanding and acceptance is critical for the growth and success of nontraditional students (Brown, 2002; Wyatt, 2011). Childcare assistants, office aides, and peer advisors are all student

employees who are required to have work-study. Based off of the literature, peer advisors are a critical component of this center (Austin, 2006; Clark, 2006; Krause, 2007). The peer advisors are trained in the areas of financial aid, pre-enrollment, and campus resources, while being able to understand the campus environment and make appropriate referrals when necessary. Advisors are required to help plan activities each semester (Cragun et al., 2010). The concept of peer advisors or mentors is an important element in the social interaction of nontraditional students as it creates connections between students who share similar situations and provides a binding network for the center.

Other elements of the center that cannot be ignored are the financial resources and budget. Student fees are used to provide staffing, programming, activities, computer lab maintenance, materials, and other support services for the department (Cragun et al., 2010). The coordinator of the center manages the budget and the childcare supervisor receives a portion of the budget and offers suggestions for funding within the childcare center. Other sources of revenue besides childcare include the Purple Pals club and the Pinnacle Honor Society. Each member of the honor society pays a \$30 membership fee; \$20 is sent to national headquarters and \$10 is retained for local membership. Purple Pals club charges \$5 per child for membership. The extra revenue is used to create more programs, upgrade computers for staff and the computer lab, and increase staffing.

Based off the report from 2009-2010 the total budget is \$258,078 with 2455 students served in 8623 sessions (Cragun et al., 2010). When you exclude salaries from the total budget, which would be \$138,878, the cost per student served is \$55.75 and \$15.87 per session. Activity tuition waivers are used by the center to provide students who work with some type of return in tuition. The center received \$4400 in 2010. Students who use the waiver must work at least 10

hours. Other means of a salary break for the center include utilizing work study students, to pay a smaller hourly wage. Although this is a brief overview of the budget and financial resources within the center, it still gives readers and idea of the costs to start up a center as well as the revenue resources necessary to effectively run a quality nontraditional center.

The final component of Weber State University's nontraditional center that will be addressed is the assessment and evaluations. Staff members are evaluated annually and a recognition program has also been created to recognize the accomplishments of staff members (Cragun et al., 2010). The center works with the Student Affairs Assessment & Research department to track five cohort groups of nontraditional students on a yearly basis for retention and graduation. Surveys are also sent out to students using a web-based program. The results of the survey are used to formulate programming ideas, outreach and advertising to students, as well as establishing activities for children and programs.

The survey suggested that students would like more activities during the weekend, either on a Friday night or Saturday, and that family-friendly elements should be incorporated (Cragun et al., 2010). The survey also showed that students want more information on financial aid and scholarships. Other assessment strategies include the use of the center. Student usage is tracked with a swipe card system. The Student Affairs Assessment and Research department maintains this information, and from 2009-2010, 2,455 students used the center from July to June with 8,623 sessions total. This data suggests that the center is a high usage area. The coordinator does not believe in the value of individual program assessments, because they are very subjective and are not designed to assess the goals of the center. The center rather focuses on the learning outcomes to determine the success and function of the space.

Outcome components focus on engagement, connection, graduation, academic integration, and diversity, but not all of the elements are included in this report (Cragun et al., 2010). The coordinator uses these components to design programs to connect students to campus and help them feel comfortable in the collegiate environment, which has shown to increase retention and graduation rates. Indicators of program success come from student attendance, return visits to the center (tracking system), continued enrollment in childcare, traffic flow of students, verbal feedback, and satisfaction surveys. Assessment and evaluation are an important component of any student affairs department and these types of indicators and outcomes help to enhance student learning outside of the classroom, while also showing the entire university the importance and significant difference that a center makes to nontraditional students as they transition into and through their student role.

This center provides invaluable resources, made available on their website, to help shape the ideal characteristics of a center. The breakdown of facilities/technology/equipment, mission/goals/outcomes, programming, staffing and leadership, financial resources and budget, and assessment and evaluation are all critical elements of a center and will be used to explain the ideal characteristics of a nontraditional center.

Utah State University

Unfortunately, Utah State University does not include any type of program review report on their website and due to my limited ability to interview center staff. I utilized their website which highlights the center's physical space as well as programming opportunities. These two elements will be evaluated in this report.

In terms of the physical space, the center utilizes two areas: a study area and social lounge (Utah State, 2014). The study lounge has computers, tables, and chairs and is meant to be

a quiet spot to focus on homework or studying. The social lounge is still utilized as a space to work, but has a more relaxed, communal atmosphere. It is utilized not only for studying, but also to socialize, relax, and eat. Features included are: kitchenette with full size fridge, microwave, paper products, group tables and chairs, couches, lap desks, computers with office supplies, copier/printer, and toy box for children. Although I cannot speak to the success of this space due to limited access to assessment and evaluation of the space, the elements align well with the eight principles of vision in the Association of College Unions International report as well as Weber State University's description and pictures of their center space. It can be assumed that the purpose, function, and resources available within this space are comparable to Weber State's design and success. Utah State's student lounges will help to confirm the ideal characteristics of a nontraditional center's physical space.

Programming is a large part of the components of the center shown on the website. Nontraditional SOAR is a student orientation, advising, and registration program that assists nontraditional students through the pre-enrollment and registration process (Utah State, 2014). Based off literature from the previous section, having separate orientations for nontraditional students is a positive transitional adjustment and allows students to not only get connected to the university resources, but also to immediately creates networking opportunities with peers as well as a sense of belonging and acceptance (Austin, 2006; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wyatt, 2011). It is important to point out that Utah State highlights this opportunity on the website, bridging the gap of students having to search for the information themselves.

Another program called Connections is a two-credit, graded academic course that is designed to prepare nontraditional students for the university environment, assist with transitions, develop academic connections, and learn about the different resources and

opportunities available (Utah State, 2014). This academic course is similar to any first-year experience course or seminar (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007) designed to assist in the development of nontraditional students and aid in their transition. The center also has a Nontraditional Student Association (Utah State, 2014). It is a student-governed organization that hosts regular activities and creates an extended support system, stemming from the nontraditional center. Social support and interactions are an essential element of academic success and provide opportunities for involvement and connection to the university, with other students in similar situations as themselves (Clark, 2006; Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011; Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007; Lundberg, 2003). Other aspects of the center include a connection with the Pinnacle Honor Society (Utah State, 2014). The structure is very similar to Weber State University.

Another interesting program is the Rapid Learning Drop-In presentations (Utah State, 2014). These sessions occur twice per month, on Wednesdays, and run from 11 am – 1 pm and are held in the actual nontraditional center. These sessions are designed with time in mind and are only fifteen minutes long. Topics include a wide range of academic, psychological, and social presentations, all of which are necessary to overcome the barriers that nontraditional students face (Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008). Other elements of the center include a nontraditional student email list (Utah State, 2014) to keep updated with all of the latest events as well as nontraditional blogs and a Facebook page, which allow students to share within their communities and express themselves. Online communities and social media are useful tools to engage students who have busy schedules (Clark, 2006). The website also has a newsletter for getting started as a Utah State student (Utah State, 2014) and has information on how to balance multiples roles, strategies to work with your academic advisor, and childcare information. These

elements are similar to Weber State University's nontraditional center and maintain the purpose of supporting and providing resources for nontraditional students, while also creating a socially involved and interactive environment.

Both of these colleges are excellent examples of what an ideal center should contain. Using the combined literature review from these two colleges, I plan to outline the characteristics of an ideal nontraditional center in the next section. The ideal characteristics will include information on physical space, technology, staffing and leadership, programming and outreach, and center functions.

Ideal Characteristics of a Nontraditional Center

Using the Association of College Unions International report I will outline the ideal characteristics of a center using the eight suggested attributes of community (Rullman et al., 2012) while also incorporating essential elements found in the literature, as well as the review of Weber State University and Utah State Universities nontraditional center. This section will include different elements including: physical space, technology, staffing and leadership, programming and outreach, and center functions (mission, goals, outcomes, assessment, and budget). This information is pertinent to student affairs practitioners who wish to change and to adapt the environment and outcomes for nontraditional students.

Physical Space

In order to create a nontraditional center, special attention must be given to the physical space. The space needs to be appropriately decentralized from the rest of campus, while still providing the highest amount of access, convenience, size, refuge, and personalization for nontraditional students (Rullman et al., 2012). The center should combine all elements (e.g. light, furniture, materials, diversity, sound, location, and activity) into some type of functional

wholeness that cannot be created only by its parts (Rullman et al., 2012). The environment needs to be engaging, while also allowing for layering (individual and group spaces) opportunities within the center. This includes creating a space that is highly responsive and can physically morph, adapt, and change throughout the year and from hour to hour.

There should be two types of spaces: quiet and social (Brown-Sica, 2012). These two types of spaces meet both the academic and social involvement levels necessary for students to be successful (Tinto, 1998). The space should have tables, chairs, and couches that are mobile and easy to change. This responsive environment is an important aspect of building a community (Rullman et al., 2012). The furniture should be arranged in a communal design, where multiple chairs are around one table for studying and couches are grouped together to encourage conversation. This further enhances peer relationship opportunities and increases the chances of educationally focused conversations (Lundberg, 2003) that will promote a bridging community, where students with different experiences, can still come together with students who have similar characteristics (Rullman et al., 2012).

A computer lab or section with computers, office supplies, and electricity usage (Wi-Fi, outlets) is also critical for student success (Brown-Sica, 2012). Students within the library study asked for equipment such as a printer, fax, and scanner, to be available for student use and both centers confirmed the importance of these office supplies (Utah State; 2014; Weber State, 2014). The research also showed the value of having a kitchen within the center (Brown-Sica, 2012; Jacoby & Garland, 2004). The kitchen should include a fridge, microwave, hot beverages machine, dishware, and a kitchen sink. Other functional pieces that could be incorporated for students are lockers. Commuter students who travel a great deal and other nontraditional

students who would like to have a place to put their items could rent these lockers or they could be supplied for free.

Besides the physical aspect of the space, hours will also need to be extended within the center (Hardin, 2008). By extending center hours to be before 8 am and after 5 pm, institutions are providing services at times that are more convenient to nontraditional students, thus increasing the accessibility of the institution as a whole. Overall, the agency of the community space should give the individuals a sense of ownership over themselves, their relationships, and the space itself that is being occupied (Rullman et al., 2012). This sense of community, belonging, and involvement on campus will only further enhance nontraditional student development and lead to academic persistence and success.

Technology

Technology is another important aspect of the center, and although it does not contribute as much to community building, it provides support for nontraditional students in their academics. Computers, office equipment, Wi-Fi, and electric outlets were mentioned in the previous section, but other aspects of technology are also important for nontraditional students. Websites need to be updated to include not only information about the center, but also adult student resources that will support students both academically and socially (Hardin, 2008). These resources need to inspire nontraditional students and motivate them to want to overcome their barriers and challenges and to persist in their academics.

Technology should also be utilized for communication and marketing strategies geared towards nontraditional students (Utah State, 2014; Weber State, 2014; Wyatt, 2011). Utilizing social media platforms, such as Facebook and Twitter, would be one solution, but not all nontraditional students use this type of media. Other avenues of communication include Utah

State's use of email lists or list serves that students can sign up for and receive information about the center and other campus activities (Utah State, 2014). Print media was also suggested as a useful marketing tool (Wyatt, 2011), so that nontraditional students could print or grab the material and read it at some point. Creating different strategies of communication using technology will be critical to keep nontraditional students up to date and informed of center news as well as other information that is pertinent to nontraditional students. There can be some type of community building, although in electronic form, using technology. Virtual communities can be created by different characteristics of nontraditional students (e.g. parents, single, age) and can help to establish and nurture relationships (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Websites that utilize online chatting and portal technology would create a more personalized relationship between the institution and the student, while also increasing access to information and encouraging engagement on campus. Portals allow students to have immediate access to personal calendars, reminders, course schedule and bill information, academic records, information about upcoming events that address their specific interests, and the online chatting feature that allows students to connect with others virtually. These virtual communities would be a great addition to the technology of a center or any institution as a whole to help nontraditional students who have busy schedules stay connected and involved with the greater campus community.

Staffing and Leadership

Staffing and leadership is an essential area for the functioning of the nontraditional center. Based off of the examples provided by Weber State University, at least two full time staff members are essential for the center to run effectively (Cragun et al., 2010). One person should be the coordinator and the other an administrative assistant. The coordinator needs to maintain the center's function, provide programming that promotes student development,

academic persistence, and creates opportunities for social interactions (Clark, 2006). The administrative assistant would provide support to the coordinator as well as other administrative duties that support the functioning of the center.

Institutions should also consider hiring a full time or part time nontraditional student advisor (Cragun et al., 2010) who can assist students with enrollment and connect them to additional resources. The advisor would need to have a strong grasp on nontraditional student's barriers and challenges, while also recognizing that they are mature adults who deserve respect (Wyatt, 2011). They would need to be able to have real, honest conversations about the potential struggles that a nontraditional student might face, while letting them know that with the correct time management and academic strategies, they can succeed. Having an academic advisor who cares about nontraditional students' success would further enhance the academic experience and create a sense of belonging and acceptance within the collegiate environment (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). This advisor could also be an advocate for nontraditional students and could create a bridge between the center and different academic units on campus. The advisor could help faculty to understand the different learning styles of nontraditional students through professional development opportunities (Baptista, 2013).

Other components of leadership could include peer advisors or mentors (Cragun et al., 2010). There have been several references to the importance of peer mentoring for nontraditional students within the literature (Austin, 2006; Baptista, 2013; Clark, 2006; Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008). Weber State University's utilization of peer advisors, not only provides working opportunities for nontraditional students, but also helps new students who are trying to negotiate college processes and procedures (Hardin, 2008). Peer advisors or mentors can be a powerful vehicle for creating and cultivating relationships (Clark, 2006), and can be used as the

binding force of social interactions within the nontraditional center. Peer mentors would hold weekly office hours (Clark, 2006), at least ten (Cragun et al., 2010), where they can meet with students, especially first-year students who are in transition into their student roles. Peer mentors can also be utilized at orientations and other pre-enrollment events as ambassadors for nontraditional students and the center. Prospective students would be able to talk with currently enrolled students about their experiences, provide them with valuable tips and resources, and encourage them to take part in the center and its activities.

Another important component of leadership within an ideal nontraditional center would be a nontraditional student association (Utah State, 2014). This association would be attached to the center, but run by students, have regularly scheduled activities, and provide a support system for nontraditional students. The association's advisory board would consist of at least four members who are willing to commit to a minimum of five hours per month and provide engaging activities for student involvement. The board would meet once a month, utilize technology as a main source of communication with other students, host one activity per month for other members of the association, and provide feedback and input, as well as obtain feedback from their peers, about the center's programming and if it is meeting the needs of the nontraditional students. This association could be within a student organization, but having it attached to the center might create more opportunities for involvement without the pressure of being a student organization on campus. These staffing and leadership positions would be a powerful guiding force within the center and could provide a solid, core foundation of support for nontraditional students who are working through their multiple roles and identities while enrolled in higher education and ultimately assist them in their academic goals.

Programming and Outreach

Programming and outreach are strongly tied together as it is essential to communicate with other functional areas on campus in order to provide maximum support for nontraditional students. Although each university will need to determine the best type of programming needs for their individual student populations, there are main programming opportunities that can be utilized within any center. Weber State and Utah State do not include every type of program that they offer, but do include strong, solid programming opportunities that are always utilized to form supportive environments and provide proper resources to nontraditional students.

Programming and outreach begins with the pre-enrollment of nontraditional students. The center's staff would need to collaborate with admissions and new student program offices in order to maximize efficiency and advocacy for the nontraditional student population. A center could be utilized for any prospective visits as well as during orientation and enrollment. Having the space available and visible to nontraditional students would immediately make them feel more connected to campus and know that this is going to be an institution where they are supported and respected (Hardin, 2008). These pre-enrollment events should also be family friendly, as much of the literature points to nontraditional students feeling more connected when they feel that their families are accepted into the collegiate environment (Austin, 2006; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wyatt, 2011). During these orientations, conversations can be focused on clarifying any issues of concern. It also provides more individualized attention to nontraditional students, and establishing available resources that will assist in academic persistence before the student even enrolls into courses (Austin, 2006). Pre-enrollment programming should also incorporate scholarship opportunities. The center staff should reach out to community members, university foundation donors, and other avenues of revenue to assist with the financial transition into the student role. Finances are always a concern for nontraditional students and if the center

can lighten that burden even slightly, they are more likely to persist and find success (Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wyatt, 2011). These types of programs let students know that there are resources available to them and will make them feel more acclimated to the college environment, which is critical for successful academic and social integration into the university.

Once students have enrolled, their student role begins, and programming must be geared towards providing resources and educational presentations that are meant to aid in academic persistence (Austin, 2006). Monthly or bi-monthly presentations on information and resources available to nontraditional students would be an important continual programming example (Austin, 2006). These presentations or programs would assist students with their academic skills (time management, study skills, learning style) during their transition into the student role (Hardin, 2008). Life skill presentations could also be utilized and incorporate money management, career development, graduate education opportunities, health and wellness, and other strategies to cope or reduce the stress within the student role and lighten the burden that nontraditional students carry (Austin, 2006). These programs would provide a great deal of support to nontraditional students and could contribute to their overall physiological and academic well-being. Centers could also turn these types of programming ideas into a first year experience course or seminar that would guide students in their first year transition and provide necessary resources in a formal classroom format (Cavote & Kopera-Frye, 2007). These types of programs also reinforce students' academic knowledge while enhancing their confidence in their personal abilities (Austin, 2006). Students will also gather together for these programming opportunities, which increase their chances of building relationships and foster social integration with students who share similar lifestyles and statuses. This enables nontraditional students to

not feel isolated on campus, but rather a part of the contributing diversity within the larger collegiate environment. It also promotes the accessibility and value of the center, by providing students with one, holistic space where they can go for any and all support services that they may need to utilize in order to find success.

Other types of programming and outreach would need to incorporate students' families as well as reaching out to other services on campus. Some type of programming for families will not only get nontraditional students more involved in the activities on campus and within the center, but will also allow them to feel more connected and accepted within the university (Austin, 2006; Jacoby & Garland, 2004; Wyatt, 2011). The Purple Pals Kids Club that Weber State has incorporated into their center is a fantastic idea (Cragun et al., 2010). Parents and children get to be involved with the campus environment, and the university connects with potential future students who want to attend Weber State University as students themselves someday. These family elements are essential for the success of nontraditional students. Other forms of outreach to other services on campus include connecting with tutoring services, counseling services, and any other resource that nontraditional students might utilize. Being able to connect students to resources that will help them persist and be academically successful are important, but informing these different departments about the unique needs of nontraditional students is of the utmost importance (Wyatt, 2011). Institutions show their commitment by being dedicated to understanding these students and providing the best services and support possible to assist them in their transitions.

The final component of programming and outreach includes their transition from school back to work. The nontraditional center could make connections with the career center and nontraditional alumni who could provide internship and mentoring opportunities specifically for

nontraditional students. Center staff must work with career counselors to ensure that they are prepared to assist nontraditional students who most likely have prior work experience, but are currently looking for a new position that matches their degrees (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Students will most likely need assistance putting together a resume or portfolio that accurately represents their knowledge, experience, and skills acquired through their multiple life roles. This support should empower nontraditional students and increase their career self-efficacy (Spitzer, 2000). Other aspects of the transition from school to work should include celebrating academic success and achievement (Jacoby & Garland, 2004). Students should be recognized through some type of commencement ceremony, potentially within the center, to provide a celebration for students and their families. This reinforces to graduating seniors as well as their fellow classmates that the center believes that they are important members of the institutional community and further enhances their sense of belonging. This feeling of community and connection to the university will hopefully carry over into loyal alumni who support the institution and its mission.

Each of these programming and outreach opportunities is critical for the identity growth and development of nontraditional students, while also allowing them to feel connected to the university. These programs provide solutions to stress reduction, academic assistance, and opportunities for social interaction and involvement in one place. The programs are an extension of the center and are just as important as the physical space.

Center Functions

The final section on ideal characteristics of a nontraditional center that cannot be overlooked is the remaining center functions that cannot be verified by literature as much as with the use of the report provided by the Weber State University example. Each university will need to design its nontraditional center mission, goals, and learning outcomes around the main

institutional mission. Each of these components is essential to the success of any nontraditional center (or nontraditional student office) as it clarifies the vision and purpose. It also makes it easier to create assessments to evaluate the center and its programs to make sure that nontraditional students are receiving and using the resources that are available to them.

Any ideal center should have the goal of creating a welcoming, friendly, and comfortable environment that helps students to feel valued and connected to campus (Cragun et al., 2010) as this type of mattering is critical for student development and academic success (Brown, 2002). The environment should also provide many opportunities for social interaction and involvement to continue to build community and strong relationships amongst nontraditional students. Learning outcomes should be aimed toward helping students on their journey toward degree attainment (Cragun et al., 2010) and can be assessed and evaluated to determine the success rate. Providing emotional support, assisting in educational success, and creating strong social interaction opportunities will only enhance the institutional mission and assist in improving the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional students, which is a positive outcome for everyone (Kasworm, 2005; Krause, 2007; Wyatt, 2011). Research has shown that when students have greater emotional and institutional support it reduces their overall stress and increases their performance in the student role (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Giancola et al., 2009; Hardin, 2008), so it is critical to have a mission, goals, and outcomes that provide proper support for nontraditional students.

The final component of the success to the center is the budget and financial resources. Weber State University funds their center through student fees (Cragun et al., 2010), but not every institution may be willing to fund the center in this way. Grants, donor contributions, and private sources of funding can also be explored, and nontraditional advocates will need to be

creative in their approach to finding funding for a center. However, using the examples provided by Weber State and having an outline of ideal nontraditional center characteristics will help in drafting and creating a solid proposal for practitioners to follow.

Although these functions cannot be fully researched, each component is necessary to run a center as well as to begin the conversation about assisting nontraditional students in a more personal, unique way than simply providing an office with services. A center provides emotional and institutional support that creates a sense of belonging and acceptance, assists with academic persistence and motivation, and provides educationally related peer relationship opportunities for social interaction. Each of these factors is necessary in the persistence, engagement, and retention of nontraditional students.

Implications and Future Research

Nontraditional students are a continuously growing population (Wyatt, 2011) that has shown a history of persistence, dedication, and survival within the higher education system (Ogren, 2003). As the population continues to grow, institutions will be faced with the task of helping lifelong learners achieve their academic and career goals. Nontraditional students have many barriers and challenges to degree attainment (Fairchild, 2003; Hardin, 2008), but with the right emotional and institutional support, nontraditional students can thrive and be successful. A nontraditional center would be an ideal “one stop” location where nontraditional students can work with other likeminded peers and can support one another as well as be provided with the resources necessary to help them in their retention and graduation efforts. Although institutions will need to find financial resources and create a budget to manage the center, the implications of the center are all positive. Institutional approaches that dedicate, combine, and coordinate physical, social and academic spaces for their students offer exciting possibilities for building

connections and increasing nontraditional student success (Clark, 2006). Many different departments as well as students themselves, will benefit from the space where they can be provided with extended institutional resources, greater emotional support, programming to aid in academic and social persistence, and the physical space itself allows for more social interactions with students who have similar barriers and challenges, limited time, and a maturity that is far greater than most traditional aged students.

Institutional Benefits of a Center

The implications of nontraditional students increasing enrollment at institutions is a large benefit. Oftentimes, nontraditional programs and services add weight to an institution in the eyes of the community (Schlossberg et al., 1989). The community views these programs as attractive assets to their towns or cities, and rather than only being a showpiece for traditional student learning, the community can be involved and invested in the college. The cultural and academic shift to support the whole community is similar to the context of a community college, where programs and resources can educate the entire population, rather than only being a benefit for 18-24 year olds. Community relationships are important because they not only improve recruitment but they also provide more opportunities for internships, practicums, and field observations that benefit all students working towards a career. Another benefit for institutions is the heavy emotional and financial investments that nontraditional students bring to the institution. Many are struggling with situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers but are still willing to work hard to be successful and to graduate. These students will be less likely to leave and provide a steady flow of tuition dollars into the institution if they have some kind of accommodations in services and feel that they matter to the campus. Creating a nontraditional center would be an ideal solution to many barriers and provide the resources necessary to

accommodate the needs of nontraditional students. Once these issues are addressed, institutions can greatly benefit from the enrollment of nontraditional students.

After institutions have gathered data and information on nontraditional student demographics, their needs, motivations, and different levels of engagement, the next step is to provide best practices and strategies for success. To design effective programs and services to help nontraditional students reach their degree goals, policymakers and postsecondary administrators need information on how many students are affected, the details of their enrollment patterns, and the nature of their persistence problems (Choy, 2002). These stakeholders must be supportive and willing to create an inclusive environment for nontraditional students. A nontraditional center would be an ideal situation for many campuses, as this would allow students to share one common place, create a sense of community, and feel that they matter on campus.

Serving Nontraditional Student Effectively

Regardless of the institution's ability to provide a nontraditional center on campus, many of the elements listed in the best practices section can be utilized on any campus that provides services to nontraditional students. Commuter campuses, private or public universities, and community colleges all benefit from having nontraditional students on their campuses and by serving them effectively, institutions can assist in their academic and social persistence (Tinto, 1998). To add to the best practices components, the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (2014) has created a standardized set of principles that any institution can follow and use to serve nontraditional students effectively:

Outreach. Conducts its outreach to adult learners by overcoming barriers in time, place, and tradition in order to create lifelong access to educational opportunities

Life and career planning. Addresses adult learners' life and career goals before or at the onset of enrollment in order to assess and align its capacities to help learners reach their goals

Financing. Promotes choice using an array of payment options for adult learners in order to expand equity and financial flexibility

Assessment of learning outcomes. Defines and assesses the knowledge, skills, and competencies acquired by adult learners—both from the curriculum and from life and work experience—in order to assign credit and confer degrees with rigor

Teaching-learning process. Faculty uses multiple methods of instruction (including experiential and problem-based methods) for adult learners in order to connect curricular concepts to useful knowledge and skills

Student support systems. Assists adult learners using comprehensive academic and student support systems in order to enhance students' capacities to become self-directed, lifelong learners

Technology. Uses technology to provide relevant and timely information and to enhance the learning experience

Strategic partnerships. Engages in strategic relationships, partnerships, and collaborations with employers and other organizations in order to develop and improve educational opportunities for adult learners

Transitions. Supports guided pathways that lead into and from the institution's programs and services in order to ensure that students' learning will apply usefully to achieving their educational and career goals

These standardized strategies provide effective solutions for institutions and align closely with many of the best practices and ideal characteristics of a nontraditional center that were outlined in this report. The implications of assessing the effectiveness of current nontraditional student support services and the decision to create a nontraditional center will only further enhance institutional goals, missions, and provide support for an ever emerging, growing population.

Future Research

Future research will need to be investigated to confirm the ideal characteristics of a nontraditional center. Research, assessment, and evaluation of other university's centers as well as empirical research will need to be continued to determine the effectiveness of a center for

nontraditional students. Possibly a model should be created, that combines the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning elements with the Association of College Unions International report on community, to create a more standardized approach to the ideal characteristics of a center and how it improves the success of nontraditional students. This report includes a great deal of literature that supports the overall purpose of effectively assisting nontraditional students, but until more evidence is provided, this report can only serve as a guide for advocates who hope to support nontraditional students. Other areas that of research that will need to be continued include evaluating the success of nontraditional students within their multiple types of identities including: age, gender, ethnicity, race, first generation, and socio-economic status. There is a real need to research these different dynamics and how each identity affects individual nontraditional students in their academic and social persistence. This would also be positive and useful research for future center's as different elements can be incorporated based off of the research that can further enhance the experience and success of nontraditional students.

Conclusion

The nontraditional student center is an ideal creation for institutions that have seen and will continue to see a large change in numbers of their population of students. Traditional students are no longer the main focus and it will be imperative that stakeholders identify the differences between these two groups of students to ensure that they are promoting nontraditional student success. Upon enrolling in the university, nontraditional students experience a major transition change and will have many barriers and needs that must be met in order to keep them engaged and persist to graduation. A nontraditional center would provide the proper emotional and institutional support, while also creating opportunities for social integration and involvement, which is difficult to recreate with only a support services office. The sense of

belonging and ownership over a center that nontraditional students would ultimately develop would be a strong motivator for success and persistence to graduation. In the end, this is the mission and goal of every institution, to develop well rounded, successful citizens who can persist to graduation and leave college with a successful career path and opportunity that will benefit not only themselves personally, but society as a whole.

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